

REGIONAL AND TOWN PLANNING IN SOUTH AFRICA—By F. A. W. Lucas, K.C.

The Report has been published of the Social and Economic Planning Council which was set up by General Smuts. The recommendations follow in certain respects those of the Uthwatt Committee concerning "land utilisation" in Great Britain. They are ably reviewed and criticised by Mr. Lucas in his article contributed to the Journal "Common Sense," December, 1945, published from 41 Commercial House, 124 Fox Street, Johannesburg.

WHEN THE SOCIAL and Economic Planning Council was set up Gen. Smuts said, at its first session: "You are here as a scientific planning body. If what you suggest may present political difficulty that is scarcely your business. You are here to suggest the best. Aim high." The Council, in its recent report on "Regional and Town Planning," seems to have forgotten that advice. It has not treated the subject scientifically and it has not aimed very high. Perhaps it feared the political power of the vested interests that would oppose such a treatment.

The report is interesting and valuable as a description of the evil state into which we have fallen as a result of the uncontrolled power of owners of land to misuse or hold out of use the natural resources of the country. It fails to record the injustice of giving anyone that power or to suggest how it can be ended and how the improvement the Council would like can be attained.

The picture which the report presents of conditions in South Africa is distressing. There is ugly congestion in the central areas and unco-ordinated sprawling suburbs characterise most of our cities. The small South African villages, with some happy exceptions, are among the drabest in the Western world. The concentration of population in urban areas is growing at an increasingly rapid rate; the provision in them of housing for the non-European workers is made at such distance from their working places that they lose much time and money in getting there, while at the same time transport difficulties are greatly increased. No town planning schemes have been put into operation. Under the existing legislation any plan must be largely static. "It crystallises what now exists and tries to prevent its becoming worse."

Waste of Natural Resources

It is not only for the towns, however, that the picture is dark. In the country areas soil erosion and waste of natural resources occur on a great scale. Tariff protection, agricultural price-assistance, and railway rating schemes, which have had far-reaching regional and locational effects, have been introduced without their range having been remotely realised.

To deal with these conditions the Council recommends regional and town planning, which would have three main purposes: "(a) Orderly, rapid and diversified regional development; (b) the prevention by that means of excessive local concentration and of excessive permanent and temporary internal migration; (c) the proper provision of amenities and improvement of the appearance of the towns." A Department of Physical Planning and Regional Development is suggested to take control of and to co-ordinate the work of necessary planning.

The report recognises that the land is the base of human activities. It describes the great social evils which flow from our present system of uncontrolled land ownership and shows that the wrong use of land results "in much loss, both to individuals and to the nation, of time and money." It recognises that the measures it suggests cannot be carried out without controlling the use of land. It realises, too, that land-owners, as distinct from land-users, grow rich without working through the presence and activities of the community, which create all land values

Though seeing all that, however, the Council fails to draw the obvious conclusions. It "recommends that the Union embark on an active programme of controlling land use," with a view to promoting certain main objectives. It then proceeds to propose measures which will apply to only small areas but which will require vast sums of money for compensation or expropriation. It points out how no town planning schemes have been adopted because the cost of expropriation of land has made them impossible. That high cost will, under its proposals, still have to be incurred and when it has been incurred the benefit of the schemes will mostly flow into the pockets of private land-owners, without any effort on their part.

Real Nature of Land Values

The reason why the Council failed to make any effective proposals is because it has not understood the real nature of land value. It does not see that value owes its existence, every moment, to the presence and activities of the community; that, if it is wrong for a landowner to obtain the unearned increment from new public services, it is equally wrong for him to be allowed to keep and claim compensation for the values due to the maintenance of the existing services. In both cases the value, as far as he is concerned, is unearned. It follows irrefutably that no private individual has any right to own or appropriate that value. It is made by and should belong wholly to the community.

The Council recognises that there must be control of land use and then proceeds to stultify all its proposals by making their realisation depend on buying back, at the public expense and at a prohibitive cost, that value which the public created. What the Council has proposed cannot be carried out. The cost of a first small instalment would be ruinous and the result of making it would so far raise the value of land not included in it, that any second instalment would be economically unsound. The rock on which our existing town planning legislation came to grief, namely, the private appropriation of land values, will just as surely wreck the plans the Council has so earnestly put forward.

Inadequacy of the Proposals

Actually, all the major problems of our country are involved in the issues which are touched on by the Council's proposals for regional planning, the relationship of our different races, the provision for all of them of adequate food, clothing, housing, the development of our industries, the orderly growth of our civilisation. They all depend for their attainment on the right and opportunity of our people to use our natural resources. We cannot get back that right and that opportunity by buying them from people who claim to be entitled to withhold them. We have to get them back. Therefore, we must find some other way than that proposed by the Council.

Fortunately we can do so, and that in a way that will do no violence to our sense of justice. If we propose to take away from a few individuals the rights they now possess, while leaving all the other members of the community with their rights untouched, as the Council suggests, we must obviously compensate those few. But, if, as we may rightly do we claim for the community the whole of the land value which it has created and continues to maintain and increase, we shall be able to do all the Council wishes, and more, without the intolerable and unjust burden which the compensation it envisaged would impose on us. To do this there would be no need to interfere in any way with the freehold title of anyone to his land. That could be retained intact, as

it is under the system of the rating of site values which is in vogue on the Rand and which is a partial application of the policy proposed above.

In return for the payment which the normal working land-owner would be required to make, he would gain many advantages from the change, one of them being the release from taxation in an amount far greater than the sum he would have to pay annually for the lands he holds and uses.

NOTES AND NEWS

THE BANANA ISLANDS. The *Crown Colonist*, 33, Tóthill Street, S.W.1, for January, 1946, has an account of the pleasant life on this group on the coast of Sierra Leone. Several passages are quotable: "Each family was given a plot of land in one of the settlements for his house and an acre further inland for farming. The only payment each family makes for the land is a tax of 5s. a year. . . . The peacefulness everywhere is something which the most remote English village cannot equal. Few Atlantic Islands can have been less affected by the surge of world affairs."

THE FRIENDLY ISLANDS. Rev. Mervyn J. Stewart who sends us this extract remarks that a similar group in the Pacific is Tonga where also a house site and eight acres are given to each married couple for a low variable quit rent with a further liability for some days' work each year on public needs, roads and planting, etc. Social conditions in Tonga were interestingly described in the charming travel book *Two Young Men See the World*, by Stanley Unwin and Severn Storr, which we reviewed in our issue of February, 1943. "No land can be bought, nor can land be sold. Not a single acre in any of the principal islands is alienated. Europeans or outsiders requiring land for any purpose can lease it, but that is all. A lease in most cases is for fifty years, but in the neighbourhood of any town or village it is for twenty-one years only. The land is the people's. . . . Everyone is independent in Tonga and there is a dignity about the bearing of the people which independence brings."

HOLLAND. With deep regret we have had cabled news from Mr. A. Sevenster of the death of Councillor H. Kolthek of Groningen. The loss of their valiant leader whose voice and pen has inspired their work through many years is a grave blow to our Dutch colleagues. It is especially hard just at this time when the campaign is being actively resumed. Mr. Kolthek's contacts with the International Union will be much missed and its members are equally bereaved. Last month we reported that the Journal *Recht en Vrijheid* had appeared in its first number after the war. We have since received the second number which now bears the title *Ons Erfdeel* (Our Inheritance) by which it will be called in the future. This number contains Mr. Kolthek's last editorials. Our readers acquainted with the Dutch language and who are interested in the developments in Holland (we include our supporters in South Africa) are invited to communicate with the co-directors A. Sevenster and J. Wiersma, St. Anna Parochie, Holland, to obtain the Journal and specimens of the new literature being published.

NORWAY. A valued colleague has passed by the death of Ferdinand Lyng. Born in 1873, Mr. Lyng graduated as a Civil Engineer in 1895. Most of his work as such was in the Norwegian Government service, first in the districts planning and supervising the building of roads, tunnels, bridges, etc., later in the Directory of Roads as Engineer-in-Chief in charge of the traffic department. He was greatly respected and liked among his colleagues and numerous friends, both for his professional skill and for his straight-forward character. His activities in the Henry George movement date back to 1914, and he rendered much effective service with lectures and writings. A notable contribution was his article on the economic crisis in the special number of the Danish *Grundskyld* celebrating Jacob E. Lange's 70th birthday in 1934. Mr. Lyng was an Executive member of the International Union for

The Council's report has given a clear and startling picture of the mess into which we have got. It has shown us, too, the obstacles which land monopoly puts in the way of our escape from it. It is a pity it did not tackle that evil. Through failing to do so it made proposals which are of no avail. When we destroy land monopoly we can achieve all the Council's wishes and more. Until we do so we can realise few or none of those wishes.

Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. With his wife, Mrs. Margarethe Lyng, he attended the International Conference in London, 1936. To Mrs. Lyng and to Mr. Lyng's brother we extend our sincere sympathies.

BEESTON AND STAPLEFORD, NOTTS. On October 11, 1945, in the House of Commons, Mrs. F. Paton asked for particulars about the 4,857 acres housing site at Dovecote Lane. Mr. Bevan said it had no rateable value being "agricultural" but was not then able to state the purchase price. Mrs. Paton has since learned from the local Press report of the Council's November meeting that the price is £2,300, being at the rate of £474 per acre. This is one of the many examples of the "land racket" now taking place under the land-purchase schemes which speak so eloquently against the injustices of our present rating system handing over to the landlord the values which the people as a whole create.

The dairy-farm of Wester Dron, Dairsie, in Fife, for which the asking price was £2,250, was sold at the Cupar mart for £4,900. Mr. J. T. Haxton of St. Andrews who sends the report from the *Dundee Courier*, a date in December, writes: "This transaction shows how the subsidies meant to encourage the farmer to grow food goes to the landlord who as such grows none." It is no isolated case. On the contrary, the price of land for farming goes up and up and acts as a lien on all future production. What prospect or hope can there be of labour's earnings and of chances of a good living for the ordinary man who thus sees the barrier of land monopoly being built ever higher? The misappropriation of the rent of land afflicts all industry, not least agriculture, and the salvation of all industry, including not least agriculture, is to stop it by the Taxation of Land Values.

Mr. Benjamin Riley, who had retired from public life and was formerly Member of Parliament for Dewsbury, died on January 6. He is to be counted among those who had the Taxation of Land Values at heart and his record of service dates back to the splendid work he did with one of the "Red Vans" of the English League in the 1890's.

The Yorkshire and Northern Counties Land Values League announces that with the departure of Mr. F. Bentley to Manchester to take up other work there, and Mr. C. H. Jones retiring from his official (hon.) duties although not from the executive, Mr. Harold Binns who has now been demobilised has been appointed as Hon. Secretary and Treasurer. Mr. Percy Roberts continues to act as joint Hon. Secretary. The League has done much active work during the past year, especially in the many meetings of Rotary Clubs addressed by its members and it looks forward to the well-sustained co-operation of all members and supporters.

Recent meetings organised by the Manchester Land Values League were addressed by Councillor H. Eastwood at the Sale Discussion Group, A. H. Weller at the Ulverston Rotary Club and Mrs. Catterall at the Crumpsall Co-operative Guild. At the Manchester Y.M.C.A. Rostrum, invitation being given for short speeches on "I advocate—," Mr. J. C. Owen stated the case for Land Value Taxation. Last month's report omitted mention of the public meeting in the Houldsworth Hall, Manchester, on December 5, Dr. S. Vere Pearson presiding and Mr. Ashley Mitchell speaking on "Religion is not Enough." A keen dis-